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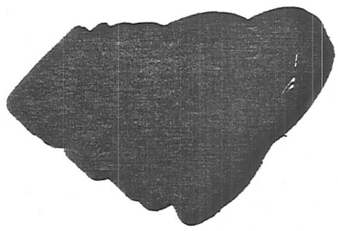

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SPOTLIGHT 1-29
(PICTURE)
SPOTLIGHT: THE HUNT BROTHERS CASE

BY STEVEN R. REED
DALLAS (UPI) -- FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS AMERICANS REELED AT THE DISCLOSURES OF WATERGATE, BELIEVING THEMSELVES OBSERVERS OF EVENTS WHOSE IMPACT WOULD NOT BE MATCHED AGAIN IN THEIR LIFETIMES.

BUT FOR SHEER INTRIGUE AND IMPERILED FORTUNES, THE HUNT BROTHERS' SAGA MAY EVOLVE INTO A TIMELY RUNNERUP.

AT STAKE ARE THE REPUTATIONS AND FREEDOM OF TWO TEXAS MULTIMILLIONAIRES WHOSE FATHER, H.L. HUNT, BUILT A $5 BILLION OIL AND LAND EMPIRE BEFORE HIS DEATH AT 85 LAST YEAR, AND THE SALVAGE RIGHTS TO THE POLITICAL CAREERS OF RICHARD NIXON, RICHARD KLEINDIENST, JOHN CONNALLY AND SOME OF THEIR ASSOCIATES IN AND OUT OF OFFICE.

NELSON BUNKER HUNT AND W. HERBERT HUNT, MIDDLE-AGED ENTREPRENEURS WHOSE WEALTH ENABLED THEM TO ASK FAVORS OF OR DO BUSINESS WITH PRESIDENTS, SHIEKHS AND KINGS, FACE TRIAL THIS SPRING IN A WEST TEXAS FEDERAL COURTROOM ON CHARGES THEY CONSPIRED TO TAP THE TELEPHONES OF THEIR FATHER'S CLOSEST AIDES.

IF CONVICTED THEY MOST CERTAINLY WOULD GO TO PRISON AS DID THE HOUSTON PRIVATE DETECTIVE CONVICTED OF CARRYING OUT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES WERE THE DIRECTIVES OF THE BROTHERS.

BUT IT IS THE LENGTHS TO WHICH THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT BELIEVES THE HUNTS WENT TO ESCAPE PROSECUTION ON THE WIRETAPPING INDICTMENTS WHICH MAY EVEN SOONER THAN THE TRIAL RESULT IN THE FURTHER DISCREDITING OF POLITICIANS WHO ALREADY HAVE TUMBLED FROM THE PINNACLE AND OTHERS WHO ARE ON THE BRINK.

THE ELEMENTS INCLUDE:

-- THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTENTION THE HUNT BROTHERS PAID TWO HOUSTON PRIVATE DETECTIVES TO EAVESDROP ON THE HOME TELEPHONES OF THEIR FATHER'S AIDES IN AN ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN DETAILS OF HIS WIDESPREAD EMPIRE ON THE CHANCES IT WOULD SOMEDAY BE LEFT TO MEMBERS OF H.L. HUNT'S "SECOND" FAMILY.

-- THE GOVERNMENT'S BELIEF THE HUNT BROTHERS SOUGHT INTERVENTION BY NIXON, KLEINDIENST AND SEN. JAMES EASTLAND, D-MISS., TO AVOID PROSECUTION.

-- PUBLISHED REPORTS BUNKER WAS OFFERED IMMUNITY BY THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION IN EXCHANGE FOR A LIST OF ARAB TERRORIST AGENTS IN THE UNITED STATES CONSIDERED POTENTIAL ASSASSINS OF THEN ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER GOLDA MEIR, DURING A TIME WHEN MRS. MEIR WAS SCHEDULED TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES.

-- THE LOSS THROUGH NATIONALIZATION OF HUNT'S MIDDLE EAST OIL HOLDINGS.

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WASHINGTON CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

-- THE DEATH OF H.L. HUNT LEFT THE BULK OF HIS ESTATE TO HIS SECOND WIFE AND THE CHILDREN OF THAT MARRIAGE. (BUNKER AND HERBERT ARE HUNT'S SONS BY HIS FIRST WIFE, WHO DIED IN 1955.)

-- PUBLISHED REPORTS THAT FLAMBOUYANT CRIMINAL ATTORNEY PERCY FOREMAN RECEIVED $100,000 IN HUNT PAYOFF MONEY TO CONVINCE ONE OF THE TWO CONVICTED DETECTIVES TO REMAIN SILENT ABOUT THE HUNT'S ALLEGED INVOLVMENT IN WIRETAPS.

-- THE REPEATED DELAYS OF THE HUNT BROTHERS' TRIAL WHICH RESULTED FROM THE JANUARY, 1970, ARREST OF THE PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS.

THE NIXON CONNECTION REPORTEDLY WAS FORMED IN 1972 AT CONNALLY'S SOUTH TEXAS RANCH WHERE THE FORMER TEXAS GOVERNOR WAS HOSTING THE CAMPAIGNING PRESIDENT.

BUNKER COMPLAINED THEN ABOUT HENRY KISSINGER'S INACTION REGARDING THE LIBYIAN SEIZURE OF HIS OIL HOLDINGS. HUNT REPORTEDLY FOLLOWED UP WITH KLEINDIENST AT EASTLAND'S MISSISSIPPI RANCH WHERE THE TRADEOFF INVOLVING THE ARAB AGENTS WAS DISCUSSED. KLEINDIENST LOST HIS POSITION AS ATTORNEY GENERAL THE FOLLOWING SPRING, HOWEVER, AND NIXON BECAME MIRED IN WATERGATE.

WASHINGTON COLUMNIST JACK ANDERSON THIS WEEK REPORTED A DALLAS FEDERAL GRAND JURY HAS HEARD TESTIMONY THAT EASTLAND RECEIVED AS MUCH AS $60,000 TO INTERVENE ON BEHALF OF THE HUNTS.

"THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO TRUTH TO THE ALLEGATIONS THAT I TOOK A BRIBE," EASTLAND REPLIED. "I HAVE NEVER TAKEN A PAYOFF FROM ANYBODY AT ANY PLACE AT ANY TIME."

HUNT RESPONDED, SAYING HE NEVER OFFERED OR PAID A BRIBE TO EASTLAND OR ANYONE ELSE.

"FOR BUNKER IT HAS BEEN ONE DISASTER AFTER ANOTHER," THE LONDON OBSERVER RECENTLY REPORTED. "HE HAS LOST ARAB FRIENDS BY TRYING TO WIN IMMUNITY VIA THE AL FATAH LIST. HE HAS LOST OIL HOLDINGS WHICH HE ESTIMATES AS WORTH $23 BILLION. HE COULD YET GO TO JAIL ON THOSE WIRETAPPING CHARGES."

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